Review of Alex Benchimol, Rhona Brown and David Shuttleton, eds., Before Blackwood's: Scottish Journalism in the Age of Enlightenment. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2015

Alex Benchimol, Rhona Brown and David Shuttleton, eds., *Before* Blackwood's*: Scottish Journalism in the Age of Enlightenment.* London: Pickering & Chatto, 2015. Pp. 163. £95. ISBN 9781848935501.

The essays in this excellent collection constitute a major contribution to the study of periodical print culture in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Scotland. Originating in a symposium at the University of Glasgow in 2010, the book provides a series of detailed case studies rather than a comprehensive overview, but its nine essays speak to each other to a quite remarkable degree.

Pre-Union print culture provides its starting point in Karin Bowie's essay on the 1704–5 *Worcester* affair, when three sailors from this English East Indiaman were hanged for piracy. The Privy Council had good reason to believe them innocent, but a Scottish ship had been seized in England, the *Edinburgh Gazette* and *Edinburgh Courant* whipped up public feeling, and the statesmen felt unable to defy the public opinion of 'the nationе' by ordering a stay of execution (17). After 1707, there was, of course, no national government on which the public sphere could have an effect. Stephen W. Brown points out that only the oppositional, anti-metropolitan stance of the Jacobite *Caledonian Mercury* guaranteed the survival of an indigenous periodical culture; yet this made possible the emergence and dominance of loyalist and anglophile publications like the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*. After 1745, partisanship was religious rather than political. Ralph McLean describes the origins of the first *Edinburgh Review* of 1755–6 in the Moderate (modernising, polite) Party in the Church of Scotland, whose leading lights included Hugh Blair and William Robertson. On McLean's account, their journal's attempt to judge every book published in Scotland by its own standards of literary 'taste' made its ambitions appear too obviously totalitarian for its survival. The 'paucity of quality Scottish literary production at this time' (45) available for review was part of the problem, and many of its personnel turned instead to the sponsorship of imaginative literature in the years that followed: of Home's *Douglas* (1757), Macpherson's Ossian (from 1760), and later of Robert Burns.

An illuminating counterpoint to Bowie's essay is provided by Rhona Brown's on the response of the Edinburgh *Weekly Magazine* to the Scotophobia of John Wilkes. This was a long way from the rabble-rousing of the *Worcester* case. Rather, Walter Ruddiman's *Weekly Magazine* responded variously with condescension and disdain, and in the name of Britain, rather than Scotland, revealing the 'Scots' growing confidence in their own public sphere' (60) in the 1760s. The two essays that follow chronicle the blow dealt to that confidence by the intensified political divisions of the 1790s. John Mee's account of James Anderson's *The Bee* (1790–94) charts the increasing difficulty of keeping a rhetoric of open debate and rational improvement free of the stigma of subversion, while Nigel Leask follows this up with a history of the short-lived reformist *Glasgow Magazine* of 1795. This was the first to publish a version of Burns's democratic hymn 'A man's a man for a' that', and an appendix usefully includes an accurate transcription of this version, not presently available in print elsewhere.

The last three essays turn to the early nineteenth-century scene. *Blackwood's Magazine* was the first to pay professional rates to contributors of imaginative work, and Gillian Hughes describes the strategies James Hogg used to turn periodical publication to financial account before this innovation, first by establishing a poetic identity which could help sell books, and then by running his own periodical, *The Spy* (1810–11). Professionalization in another sense is at stake in Megan Coyer's study of the role of medical men in Edinburgh periodical culture. The basis of the (new) *Edinburgh Review*'s cultural authority in its identification with professionals as a social group proved unstable in the case of medicine, as the politicised nature of the profession's own structures made its

contributions look factional and self-interested. This collection's last essay provides a particularly satisfying conclusion to the whole. David Stewart convincingly argues that periodicals themselves were instrumental in establishing the sense of periodicity by which we understand them. In doing so he invites us to be sceptical of *Blackwood's* claim to be founding a new era in periodical culture, a claim which this collection uses to delimit its period. The dialectical relationship that Stewart traces with the much older *Scots Magazine* suggest that the continuities between 'before *Blackwood's*' and 'after *Blackwood's*' may be as interesting as the differences.

The exploration of the important institutional context within which so much of the imaginative writing of the Scottish Enlightenment was produced and consumed will make this volume an essential reference point for future studies in this area and in British periodical culture more widely.

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